

UK Terror Level Raised Causing Major Delays and Changes in Security Procedures at All UK Airports

Major delays are expected at all UK airports after the nation's threat level was raised to "critical" Thursday, August 10 when police disrupted an apparent plot to blow up planes in mid-flight.

The highest possible alert level, raised by the British Home Office, means "an attack is expected imminently," and authorities have said no hand luggage would be allowed onto planes.

A months-long intelligence operation by the anti-terrorist branch and security service resulted in several arrests overnight. Britain's Home Secretary John Reid called the alleged plot significant and said it was designed to "bring down a number of aircraft through mid-flight explosions, causing a considerable loss of life. "The aim of the alleged plot was to explode devices carried aboard planes in handheld luggage -- especially on flights from Britain to the United States.

Hand luggage will not be allowed into the cabin of a plane and passengers will only be allowed to take a wallet, travel documents and other essential items in a clear plastic bag. All passengers must be hand searched, and their footwear and all the items they are carrying must be X-ray screened. Due to the nature of the threat revealed by this investigation, British authorities are prohibiting any liquids, including beverages, hair gels, and lotions from being carried onto airplanes. Laptop computers, mobile phones, iPods, and remote controls were among items banned from being carried onto planes. British Airways said some flights were likely to be canceled. British Airways said that passengers who do not wish to fly on Thursday can rebook on flights leaving over the next two weeks.

The British Department for Transport has issued important travel advice to anyone traveling from a UK airport. Following this morning's police action, security at all UK airports has been increased and additional security measures have been put in place for all flights. With immediate effect, the following arrangements apply to all passengers starting their journey at a UK airport and to those transferring between flights at a UK airport. All cabin baggage must be processed as hold baggage and carried in the hold of passenger aircraft departing UK airports. Passengers may take through the airport security search point, in a single (ideally transparent) plastic carrier bag, only the following items. Nothing may be carried in pockets:

- pocket size wallets and pocket size purses plus contents (for example money, credit cards, identity cards etc (not handbags))
- travel documents essential for the journey (for example passports and travel tickets)
- prescription medicines and medical items sufficient and essential for the flight (eg, diabetic kit), except in liquid form unless verified as authentic
- spectacles and sunglasses, without cases

- contact lens holders, without bottles of solution
- for those traveling with an infant: baby food, milk (the contents of each bottle must be tasted by the accompanying passenger) and sanitary items sufficient and essential for the flight (nappies, wipes, creams and nappy disposal bags)
- female sanitary items sufficient and essential for the flight, if unboxed (e.g. tampons, pads, towels and wipes)
- tissues (unboxed) and/or handkerchiefs
- keys (but no electrical key fobs) All passengers must be hand searched, and their footwear and all the items they are carrying must be x-ray screened. Pushchairs and walking aids must be x-ray screened, and only airport-provided wheelchairs may pass through the screening point.

In addition to the above, all passengers boarding flights to the USA and all the items they are carrying, including those acquired after the central screening point, must be subjected to secondary search at the boarding gate. Any liquids discovered must be removed from the passenger. There are no changes to current hold baggage security measures. Regrettably, significant delays at airports are inevitable. Passengers are being asked to allow themselves plenty of extra time and to ensure that other than the few permitted items listed above, all their belongings are placed in their hold baggage and checked in. These additional security measures will make travel more difficult for passengers, particularly at such a busy time of the year. But they are necessary and will continue to keep flights from UK airports properly secure. In light of the threat to aviation and the need to respond to it, the British government is asking the traveling public to be patient and understanding and to cooperate fully with airport security staff and the police. If passengers have any questions on their travel arrangements or security in place at airports they should contact their airline or carrier.

At Heathrow Airport, hundreds of people are unable to get into the terminal. Terminal One is completely at a standstill. Nobody is being checked in at all. Increased security measures are also having a huge impact at Gatwick airport.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security raised its alert threat to the highest level of "severe," or red, for commercial flights originating in the United Kingdom and bound for America and the threat level has been raised to "high," or orange for all other commercial flights operating in or coming to the United States.

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